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MCS: Types of Housing

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Our homes should be a retreat from the hustle and bustle of the daily routine, but for many individuals, their homes are potentially dangerous. Many interior materials and products that are used every day emit chemicals into the air and affect the indoor air quality (IAQ).

One reason for this problem is that we spend more time indoors within airtight buildings. Another is that our energy-efficient houses do not allow gases emitted from products to escape from the building.

Thus, more of us are at risk of developing multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) because we spend the greatest amount of our time indoors in our airtight, energy efficient houses (EPA 1994, Pilatowicz 1995).

Individuals with MCS need clean, safe, healthy interior environments. When symptoms of severe MCS have been triggered, the person may become too ill and cannot work outside the home and the situation only circles around on itself and becomes worse. Therefore, it is important that appropriate housing is a priority, no matter how challenging it may be.

Of the various housing types—single-family homes, condominiums, town homes, apartment buildings, mobile homes, or temporary housing—not all are appropriate for someone with MCS.

Housing types that are 30 years old or more are generally the safest. However, any remodeling changes may have introduced toxic materials.

Older housing types may also contain odors from previous owners (e.g., odors from body, fragrances, cooking, etc.).

Newer or remodeled houses are a great challenge, because very few can be considered chemical-free. However, some housing types are being built using chemical-free products and materials. As a general rule, these types are built specifically for someone with MCS, asthma, or other allergies.

A greater challenge is temporary housing such as hotels, motels, etc. These types can also have similar issues with materials as well as harboring odors from a variety of occupants.

If possible, the best solution is to build new and to use chemical-free products. Products and materials used in the construction and finishes on wood, walls, and floors must be carefully researched to assure a chemical-free built environment (Bower 1993). A builder, architect, and/or interior designer with knowledge in this area can assist you in creating an appropriate environment for you.

Listed on the next page are various housing types with advantages and disadvantages of each:

<i>HOUSING</i>	<i>ADVANTAGES</i>	<i>DISADVANTAGES</i>
Older housing	Older materials free of toxins. Solid wood floors. Solid wood cabinetry. Not remodeled (in original state) or remodeled with nontoxic materials. Old furnace replaced with a new, efficient, and healthy system.	Insecticides or termiticides may have been used. Closets may harbor odors from artificial fragrances or body odors from previous occupants. Asbestos or lead paint may have been used. Toxic materials may have been used in remodeling. Leaky or damp basement that may produce mold. Old furnace system may still be in use.
Lustron home	Suitable for MCS. Built of steel. Located in cities with outdoor air pollution. Magnets can be used to hang accessories.	Not energy efficient. Located in cities with outdoor air pollution. Difficult to hang pictures on walls of steel.
Mobile home	Older (25-30 years) mobile home is healthier. Older materials without toxins or materials	Avoid newer mobile homes. Closets may harbor odors from artificial fragrances or body odors from previous occupants. Toxic materials may have been used in remodeling. Both newer and older mobile homes may be poorly insulated.
Apartment units	Older is preferred. Older: materials without toxins such as hardwood floors and plaster walls may have been used. Upper floors are safer, because they are a greater distance from basement and traffic fumes. Steam heat.	Newer are often mass-produced. A tendency to use least-expensive materials that contain toxins. Old or new: odors, smells, fumes from other units may affect unit you are considering.
Temporary housing	Hotels and motels: see apartment units.	Tents and campers: Tents treated with waterproofing chemicals. New campers constructed with man-made products may contain toxins.
Remodeled or new houses	Require nontoxic materials and installation/application techniques before remodeling or building new. Choose longer-lasting, safe materials for the interior. Locate and hire a contractor who is familiar with nontoxic construction.	Must allow for release of toxic fumes before moving in. May be initially more expensive. Not all contractors are familiar with nontoxic construction.

References

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